



West Valley VIEW

The community newspaper of Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Litchfield Park & Tolleson, AZ
Phone (623) 535-8439

Friday, March 19, 2010

Preparing for a nightmare *SWAT teams use EMCC campus in training for hostage situations*

Friday, March 19, 2010



AVONDALE AND GOODYEAR
SWAT officers hold their positions outside a classroom where a mock gunman holds hostages during a police training exercise at Estrella Mountain Community College Monday. The mock shooting incident was designed to be a Columbine-like scenario. To see more pictures, click [HERE](#).

Monday morning started with a bang at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

Gunfire jolted campus authorities and Avondale and Goodyear SWAT teams into action.

The "crisis" was a law-enforcement training session. The exercise was intended to give area SWAT teams the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the college and practice how to handle an active-shooter scenario.

Administration of justice students acted out a school-shooting scenario similar to those that occurred at Columbine High School in 1999 and Virginia Tech in 2007. The participants followed a pre-written script of events, while officers were not told how the scenario would play out.

At 8:52 a.m. a call came over police radios, "Shots fired in Estrella Hall. We have injured people, second floor of Estrella Hall."

Minutes later, a student ran from the building yelling, "He's got a gun! I think he shot somebody!" The gunman ran from the building, opening fire on bystanders before entering a room on the second floor of Montezuma Hall and taking a class hostage.

Goodyear and Avondale SWAT officers crept up the staircase behind shields and with weapons drawn.

"Unfortunately, these types of shootings have taken place," said Reuben Gonzales, spokesman for the Avondale Police Department. "It's important to be able to have the two teams be able to work together in the event of an active shooter scenario like this. And we'll have to be able to work with campus public safety; they will be the first responders."

The exercise was carried out during the college's spring break, so no classes were in session. On a typical morning, the campus at Dysart and Thomas roads would have about 2,200 students attending classes. The campus was on lockdown during the training and buildings were cordoned off from public access. The weapons used for the training session contained no ammunition. Officers were safety-checked and had tape around one leg to indicate they carried no live ammo.

The "shooter" was portrayed by instructor Jim Cerven. He held a classroom hostage for about an hour and a half before police brought him down the stairs in custody.

During the exercise, negotiators yelled through the door, constantly trying to stay in communication with the shooter and hostages. A robot was used to deliver a phone in the room and hostages were intermittently released. At one point, officers carried a "victim" down the long outdoor stairway on a stretcher.

"I thought it was awesome," said Charles Summers, the college's director of public safety. "We put into play our emergency response procedures. The cooperation between the Avondale and Goodyear SWAT teams was great.

"Hopefully, we'll never have to do this for real. It was a great training exercise, though."

Beth Kristin Ott can be reached by e-mail at bott@westvalleyview.com.

Related Links

Content © 2010 West Valley View
Software © 1998-2010 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved